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ABSTRACT

A basic overview of experiential education is provided in this fact sheet. Topics covered include: (1) a definition of experiential education; (2) learners' needs and educational goals that can be met through experiential education; (3) descriptions of six types of experiential education programs; (4) guidelines for 10 key areas to consider when planning programs; and (5) a list of areas in which staff development may be needed. A bibliography of three references and 15 additional resources on experiential education, most of which are available from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system, is included. (DC)

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Experiential Education.

OVERVIEW: ERIC File Sheet No. 1.

by

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ERIC OVERVIEW

FILE SHEET No. 1: Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

This file sheet gives a basic *overview of experiential education.* It is designed to help you understand what experiential education programs are, how they can help students, and how they can be developed. In addition to this basic information, resources, principally from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system, are listed at the end of this file sheet. These resources provide more complete information, which can help you plan, implement, and evaluate experiential education programs.

WHAT IS EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION?

Experiential education means learning by doing. It refers to all programs that are designed to expand the setting of learning experiences beyond the traditional school environment to occupational and community settings. These programs use planned experiences, which are individually designed to help learners acquire the attitudes, skills, and knowledge important to work and other life roles. Thus, experiential education promotes cooperation between traditional educational institutions and business, industry, labor, government, and community groups to support learning. Some examples of experiential education are cooperative education, apprenticeship programs, internships, field experience programs, and work experience programs.

WHAT LEARNERS' NEEDS CAN BE MET THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION?

Experiential education lets learners, both young and old, apply their interests, skills, abilities, and knowledge to real-life situations. The experiences support the learners' need to –

- understand the application of basic educational skills to adult life (family, leisure, consumer, and occupational roles);
- become aware of a variety of occupational options;
- test occupational choices before investing time in training programs;
- develop an understanding of the importance of appropriate work attitudes;
- earn income to continue education;
- develop new skills that will help in the upgrading of employability skills;
- explore mid-life occupational options before making decisions related to career changes.

WHAT EDUCATIONAL GOALS CAN BE MET THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION?

Experiential education programs can help learners achieve a variety of educational and life goals. The goals that become the focus for any particular program will depend on the specific needs and characteristics of learners in the program. Experiential programs can help learners –

- explore various career areas to learn more about the types of workers in the area, the work environment, and the activities involved in the occupation;
- examine career-related interests, values, attitudes, and skills;
- understand the relationship between work and school and develop specific educational plans;
- make decisions about occupational areas to enter;
- develop skills for specific occupational areas through on-the-job experience;
- apply basic skills and academic subject matter in work situations;
- learn general work skills and behaviors (e.g., how to talk to a supervisor) that will be successful in any work situation;
- strengthen interpersonal skills with people in various age groups.

WHERE ARE EXPERIENTIAL PROGRAMS BEING USED?

In the past, experiential components have been used in vocational education programs, in cooperative education programs, and in on-the-job training programs. More recently, however, experiential education has been applied to educational programs of all types for all levels of learners. Some of these applications include the following:

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- *Vocational education* continues to use experiential components that provide work experience for learners in jobs related to their training area. These programs combine work experience activities with classroom instruction.
- *Academic programs* are also using experiential education components. Activities within these components provide learners with the opportunity (1) to observe and talk with employers in their fields of study, (2) to understand the application of formal education to occupational activities, and (3) to evaluate the feasibility of specific occupations for themselves.
- Experiential education has been used widely as a method for delivering *career education* programs to learners at all age levels, including elementary students. In these programs, experiential activities are used to support career exploration and to help students achieve individual learning objectives. When exploration is the goal, students are assigned to several different work sites, thus providing an opportunity to gain first-hand information about a variety of occupational areas. When experiential activities are used to support learning, the program is coordinated by a learning manager, who helps students achieve individual learning objectives.
- Experiential education programs have also been used successfully to help *special needs students* develop basic personal-social and employability skills. Originally, these programs were used in vocational rehabilitation sheltered workshop situations where disabled individuals combined work with the development of these skills. Now, the application of experiential education can help all handicapped youth and adults develop and use skills in gainful employment.
- *Youth employment programs,* currently a major national focus, are designed to meet the special needs of out-of-school youth—the need for immediate income, for developing entry-level skills required to obtain stable employment, and for educational settings other than the traditional learning environment where they may have a history of failure. Experiential education programs are one of the more promising types of programs for meeting the needs of these youth.
- *Postsecondary education* has also used experiential education to allow learners to test their career decisions before investing a long period of time in professional preparations; develop a work experience history prior to graduation; acquire specific occupational knowledge and behaviors; and earn money to support their college education.

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING PROGRAMS

As with all educational programs, the success of experiential education programs depends upon careful planning and management. Here are some key areas to consider when developing these programs.

- *Access for All Learners* Experiential education should be available to all learners, with program experiences based on assessed individual needs and provided at the time learners can best benefit from the experiences.
- *Learner Objectives* Since these programs are intended to help students meet individualized learning objectives, it is important to state these objectives clearly so that learners, program staff, and personnel at the experiential learning site have a clear understanding of the purpose of the learning experience.
- *Site Selection* The sites used for experiential learning programs should be selected in response to the needs of the learners. Learners need the proper setting to develop individual, personal, social, educational, and career development competencies.
- *Program Development* Because experiential education programs require coordination between the school and a variety of other organizations, programs will be more effective if they are started on a small-scale basis and expanded gradually. This provides time to develop procedures, train staff, and build sustained cooperation with the organization that will provide the sites for the experiential program.
- *Personnel Preparation* Experiential education programs involve educational program staff and experiential site personnel. Site personnel need to understand the goals of the program, their role in supporting the training process, and their relationship to the education program staff.
- *Structure for Learning* Learning activities in the experiential education setting must be designed to accommodate individuals with different learning needs. Furthermore, learners need not only learning activities but also time to reflect upon and interpret the meaning of these activities.
- *Diversity of Experience* Experiential education programs should involve the learners in a diversity of learning and work experiences that provide motivation, interest, and an understanding of various ways in which skills can be applied. Activities should reflect all employment levels rather than only entry levels.
- *Policy Issues* There is a cluster of policy issues that needs to be addressed when developing experiential education programs. These include the following: How can workers at the experiential education site be guaranteed that the learners will not displace them from their jobs? How can the program ensure its compliance with labor laws and regulations? If learners will be paid, how can these salaries be cooperatively determined in the context of related labor regulations and collective bargaining agreements? What are the criteria for granting academic credit for experiential education learning activities? Will labor and management recognize experiential education programs as providing valid work experience?
- *Affirmative Action* Experiential education has a role in supporting affirmative action programs. This role includes encouraging learners to examine their own stereotypes and to explore nontraditional career areas. Additionally, program staff need to encourage minority students to participate in the program and help personnel at the experiential education site understand the needs of these students.
- *Evaluation* The program needs to develop an ongoing process to evaluate learners' progress in achieving their

individual learning objectives. The assessment should also suggest ways in which the experiential education component can be improved or modified.

WHAT COMPETENCIES DO PROGRAM STAFF NEED?

A final but important consideration in setting up experiential education programs is that of teacher and counselor training. These programs require staff to use competencies not necessarily part of their traditional role as educators. Therefore, program staff need additional preparation in the following competency areas:

- Planning, organizing, and developing goals and objectives for an experiential education program
- Communicating and promoting experiential education with a variety of agencies, groups, and individuals
- Implementing career development, guidance, and counseling theory and practices
- Meeting individual needs of students
- Facilitating, designing, arranging, and providing learning activities that enable student participants to integrate school and work experiences
- Establishing, developing, coordinating, and monitoring experiences in work settings
- Evaluating program and student achievement

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION . . .

This file sheet has provided a basic OVERVIEW of experiential education. The documents listed in the bibliography will provide you with more comprehensive information to help you start an experiential program or improve an existing one. Further, you can always find additional and related information from documents contained in the ERIC system under the following DESCRIPTORS. (The ones most directly related to experiential education are designated by asterisks.)

Apprenticeships	*Internship Programs
Clinical Experience	On-the-Job Training
*Cooperative Education	*Practicums
Cooperative Programs	Work Experience
*Experiential Learning	*Work Experience Programs
*Field Experience Programs	

If you need further help in finding these or other materials, contact the User Services Coordinator, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1960 Kenny Road, Columbus, Ohio 43210. (Phone 800-848-4815 or 614-486-3655.)

Materials published by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education may be purchased from National Center Publications at the same National Center address and phone numbers as the ERIC Clearinghouse.

Single copies of this File Sheet are obtainable free from the Clearinghouse's User Services Coordinator.

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